

## [Mrs. John Coleman]

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Ridegbaugh, Mildred - P.W.-1,060

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Folklore Pioneer history

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Page 1 [Tales- Brief life history S-240 REMINISCENCES OF A PIONEER

Her no longer brawny fingers fondled the aged shawl. She slowly, rather wearily, pleated the weave and then pressed it back into place. Her gray head nodded slightly as she remembered, and in her tired eyes gleamed something from the past.

She is Mrs. John Coleman, 74 years old, and a resident of Houston for the past 42 years. She is a Daughter of the Confederacy, a Daughter of the Republic, and is a writer and member of the National Geographic Society.

Her father was the famous John T. Cox, Texan Ranger, of second regiment, Co. D, who was fatally wounded in battle for the capture of the bell from the Harriet Lane. FRONTIER LIFE.

She first remembered when, as a small child, she sat listening to the tales of Cherokee Co. from the lips of Sadie Gibbons, first white child born in the country. She remembered vaguely of Chief Bean's return to the plantation with his friendly Cherokee tribe for the annual ritual of drowning their evil spirits in old Bean Creek. C12 - [2/?? ??] 2 She remembered how the friendly chief lifted her high above his head while the rest of the tribe turned their backs and bent low to the ground paying their respect to the white child.

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Friendly Indians from Lamar and Grayson counties taught the white settlers how to make tonic from root bitters. Substances use were snow root, black hawk root, gransy gay beard, each of which were mixed with corn whiskey. A tablespoon was administered daily to all members of the settlement. These Indians also taught them how to dye their thread with root dye, how to make mud crocks, and how to built "spring houses". The "spring house" was a cellar built below the earth around a spring for the purpose of cooling and keeping meats. LIFE IN THE STOCKADES

Mrs. Coleman fingered the worn shawl strings, as she told about her life in the stockades.

"Our lives hung on threads when the Indians attacked the fort while the scalps of our neighbors dangled from their belts. Even we smaller children were stationed with flint back rifles, relics from the American Revolution. The grim faces of my parents come before my mind's eye as I remember my younger brothers being sent to climb the stockade picket to see if there were any Indians near. Often the children were left alone to defend' the fort while the elders went for ammunition." 3 PLANTATION LIFE

From Grayson Co. the Cox family moved to Harris Co. to a large plantation. Mrs. Coleman explained that the sliding partitions of the old plantation house were remarkable in their simplicity.

"Whey were constructed in such a way as to fold the entire wall into the ceiling grooves. An eight room house could easily be transformed into one large room", she explained.

CUSTOMS "Sitting Mammy"

"In one corner of the room stood from three to five three-legged skillets, a cock-pit and a fire-place. In an easy chair at the end of the pit-turner sat black mammy, her hands mechanically operating the pit-turner. Once in a while her hand would go up to the chimney oven above her head. The chimney oven was a box-like crevice in the chimney where the food would stay hot and moist. Down in the edge of the fireplace on the grates

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there were evidences of an 'ash cake' hidden somewhere in the coals. 'Ash cake' was moist, salted cornmeal rolled in cabbage leaves and baked in ashes. The preparation proved the favorite with the plantation family". The "Shawl Pin"

As Mrs. Coleman gathered the shawl about her shoulders she told of the "shawl pin." 4 "In the days of early Texas, overcoats were not known to simple folk. I never saw a coat until I was a grown woman. Men, women and children wore large home-spun shawls about their shoulders. They pinned these shawls with pins that were two-feet in length. When situations created the necessity, they used these pins as weapons against wild animals. Many a time can I remember guarding meat that we were bringing home with the 'shawl pin' in my hand. Sometimes we used them as shovels in digging herbs. These pins were shaped very much like a safety pin." ANIMAL PECULIARITIES.

Wild hogs were always plentiful in the wooded country of Harris Co. They came in great hordes from the north country towards the sea. Wild turkey were also plentiful. Mrs. Coleman says:

"We took a turkey call, made of a goose quill, and hid in the underbrush. Three minutes after we gave the call, we could hear a rumbling for miles; and over fields, stumps, bushes, and trees the turkeys would come. Pigeons flew in great hordes, blackening the sun for hours. The flapping of huge wings and the guttural cries of the pigeons sounded like a hurricane or a storm at sea".

The pigeons, however were dread to the country because they stole the acorns from the trees. "At night we could hear the acorns grinding together in the craws of the birds for forty miles in any direction", she declared. 5 "I have seen as many as six wild squirrels to one ear of corn. I can also remember when I was about six years old, when I came in from the fields and told mother I had killed sixteen rattlers that day. She said it was fine but she hoped I'd do better next day". SUPERSTITIONS.

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One of the most prevalent superstitions was regarding the burial of partially decayed materials under steps of the house of the person to whom one wished harm. Some prescriptions meant death, some insanity, and others only ill health. The certain "death prescription" was the combination of rotten tomatoes, rusty nails and horse hair. Chicken bones and a rusty hoe buried together under the door still brought ill health to the one who walked over it day after day. The combination of an old dress and thirteen fingernails would also produce a "decline". The "crazy dose" or concoction to procure insanity, was administered by putting herbs in the victims's coffee.

Consultant: Mrs. John Coleman, age 74, 106 S. Wayside Drive, Houston, ex-writer for National Geographic. (interview, 9-5-36).

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